

ANDREW CASTAGNE

— OR —

ADVENTURE OF AN OLD MARINER

OF THE BRIGANTINE

SWORDFISH

Wrecked in the

GULF OF ST-LAWRENCE

IN 1867

QUEBEC

PRINTED BY JOS.-G. GINGRAS & CIE.

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OF THE BUREAU

SWORDSMAN

By the Author

GULE OF ST. LAWRENCE

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The following story will make known the terrible sufferings which were endured by the crew of the Brigantine *Swordfish* and more particularly Andrew Castagne, sailor on board, in the wreck of that vessel at Mont-Louis, in the Gulf of St-Lawrence.

Before this misfortune, Castagne had travelled all over the seas of the Globe. That worthy sailor was only 11 years of age when he took first the idea of being a sailor. He is now fifty-two years old.

No one deserves more than him the sympathy and commiseration of the public.

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Before this misfortune, Castagne had travelled all over the seas of the Globe. That worthy sailor was only 17 years of age when he took first the idea of being a sailor. He is now fifty-two years old.

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Story of an old Mariner

SHIPWRECK OF THE SWORDFISH.—DEATH OF THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP AND A WOMAN.—TERRIBLE POSITION OF THE CREW.—ANDREW CASTAGNE DEPRIVED OF HIS HANDS AND FEET.

On the 27th of November 1867, the Brigantine *Swordfish* left the Harbour of Québec for Halifax. On board were Captain Duquet, Cyrien Morin, chief mate, Andrew Castagne, second mate, Antoine Laprise and his wife—the latter acting as cook—Patrick Reilly and Lawrence Boyle. A few days before they left, the weather had been rough, and the cold very severe. But at the time of their departure, the weather was more favourable. A fair wind had swelled the sails of the ship and every thing predicted a prompt and happy trip. The brave good sailors of the *Swordfish*, were accustomed long ago to see without fear the fury of the waves, the roaring gale, but they were far suspecting then, the misfortune which awaited them.

The 28th, at ten o'clock in the morning, the pilot landed at Father-Point.

A brisk breeze from the north and lasted

untill 11 o'clock P. M. At one o'clock in the afternoon a quite calm prevailed.

But that quiteness was of short duration. A wind from the east began to blow, with it came a heavy fall of snow; the snow fell so heavy that the Captain soon ordered the tackling and rigging. The top sails to be moored; and the vessel hood too.

At six o'clock in the morning, the 29th, the sailors were ordered to let go the rigging, as soon as the cross winds ceased to blow and the snow to fall. The wind blow north west.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Pointe-des-Monts, was passed. The weather was clair, the shore on both sides could be plainly seen by the crew. The Captain then had decided to pass on the south side of the Island of Anticost.

At 8 o'clock, the vessel was in a complete hurricane. The gale was furious. Two sails were carried away.

An intense cold was at the time prevailing. The hlem was covered with ice; very soon after, it was impossible to work the rudder of the ship.

The furious waves began to wash over the deck. The ship was then unmanagable. The sails were furled and the ship directed towards land, with the intention of putting about at four o'clock in the morning,

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At about midnight the hurricane seemed to increase in violence. The snow was falling so heavily that the sailors could not see ten feet in front of them.

The brigantine was taking in water at this time, worked as she was by the tremendous waves which were falling upon deck. All the pumps were frozen with the exception of one, full of ice and unserveable. The one they could use was constantly employed, in spite of the waves washing over the deck, the unfortunate sailors, completely wet by the icy water, which formed itself into heavy pieces of ice upon the poor unfortunates.

A few minutes before four o'clock in the morning, the captain exclaimed as loudly as he could : land ! land ! I see the land ! let us put about at once, if not, oh ! God we are all lost.

In a moment, all hands were at work. But it was of no use. The chief mate could not turn the wheel and the sailors could not succeed in shaking the sails, the helm of the rudder and the blocks were all full of ice.

The vessel striking with violence against a rock, in front a terrible crackling followed, the brigantine was in a broken state and laid on one side and almost disappeared.

under water when the waves were striking her. Nothing can give an approximate idea of the fearful position of the unfortunate crew of their terrible apprehensions having no other hope for their life than a broken ship.

To leave by the life boat was impossible. The waves striking the rocks at a height of fifty or sixty feet and the falling snow with abundance preventing them from ascertaining where they were.

Of all the crew, the captain seemed to be the most undispair. Catching hold of a rope, he cried : « Let us stand close together, if we disappear in the sea, then we shall perish side by side. » That brave man had witnessed imminent dangers previous, but he had never felt to that extent before with such a deep impression.

A gleam of hope was still in the heart of the first sailor, Andrew Castagne. Taking a small axe in the cabin so as to cut the riggings and so cause the falling of the main mast, to lighten the vessel. Just at this moment the waves striking the cabin with violence carried it away, but Castagne was not discouraged and he began to work.

The first rigging being cut, the main mast at once fell on the capeside, consequently the vessel appeared more steady. Then, all

the sailors stood in the middle of the deck taking hold of a rope, expecting with terrible anxieties the end of the drama of which they were the involuntary actors.

At eight o'clock the weather was clear enough to permit them to see the shore and recognize that the threatening at foot of which they stood was the Point of Gros Male, a sort of immense entrance of a perpendicular shape with a flat shore on one side, the length of about fifty yards, on the Gaspésie side.

Cyprien Morin urged his companions to try a landing. The brave first mate was the first who took hold of the fallen mast. The big end of the same being still fastened to the ship, but the other end could not touch the rock, it was short of from twenty to thirty feet. C. Morin was followed by captain Duquet.

At this moment a heart rending scene took place. Antoine Laprise's wife after a night of horrible anxieties had separate forever from her husband. The latter crying and broken hearted said: "Dear wife, I don't know what to do, I don't see no way for your landing."

—My dear husband, answered the resigned wife, save your life if it is possible. It is preferable, I should die alone.

The separation then took place amid fearful agonies. With the exception of Castagne,

all the sailors took hold of the mast full of ice. The first on shore waiting for his companions, which when at the end of the mast slid on a rope across the water, unfortunately, the captain could not reach the shore, completely exhausted and his hands frozen. M. Duquet lost hold of the rope and was carried away by the waves, and desappeared from their sight for ever.

Castagne not willing first to land on shore soon altered his mind, and followed the others example. While crossing ashore, his hands and feet mere frozen. When arrived there, he did what he could to reach the east part of the Cape, so as to cling to it.

With incredible efforts that worthy sailor could accomplished half of that ascension, but the unfortunate could not go any farther, a stone having rolled under his feet, he soon was at the foot of the cliff again.

Unable to move, almost insensible, he had to remain there on that frozen shore. If Castagne had been able to reach the top of the rock, he would have seen three habitations, a good fire and people in a position to relieve him—but alas ! Providence had decided otherwise. The poor man bareheaded, his hair frozen to the ice, on looking around him saw but desolation, the roaring of the gale and the waves on that deserted shore, the

ship mooved in all directions, violently ; it was rapidly breaking up.

The poor man realizing his fearful position, lost all hope of recovery and consequently he prepared himself to die ; he begged from God forgiveness of all his faults, offering to him the sacrifice of his life. His thoughts were also given to his family. Very far, in a house at Quebec, where fond beings who he cherished more than his own life, a wife and children which he never expected to see again.

The second mate Morin had separated, from his companions in search of some habitation, he had taken a westerly direction. After having walked about three miles with all possible pain, he had fallen on the snow, frost bitten, and never expecting to be able to rise again, when two strangers accosted him.

When they enquired : What are you doing here, Sir.

Morin informed them of the sad story and the cause of him being on the shore and in going in search of help.

—I fell exhausted and cannot walk any longer, am I far from any habitation asked, Morin.—No, replied the two strangers, only about two miles. We will convey you there, at once.

Upon this, the two men carried him away with them. He had only the surface of his hands frozen. He thanked his liberators a thousand times. Remembering the other poor unfortunate which he had left behind him, he said to his liberators.

—I shall always be greatful to you for having save my life, but I must ask another favor from you.

Far away on the shore, there are four men paralysed from the cold and unable to walk and on board of the wrecked vessel there is a woman. For God sake, go and bring them with you.

Five houses composed the little village known under the name of Anse-Pleureuse, which was reached safely by the sailor with the help of his two guides. Soon after they arrived, Mr. Bouchard informed the other families of the wreck of the *Swordfish*, and asked the help of all.

In consequence, fifteen men took the direction of the ship wreck.

The distance was made with great difficulty in account of the shore been covered with a heavy fall of snow, also a very strong wind blowing from the north, with difficulty they arrived on the scene.

Antoine Laprise was the first discovered. The poor sailor was lying on a stone, his

back to the wind at the foot of the rock, at a space of about one hundred and fifty yards from the ship. He had long ago loose any hope of being saved.

His astonishment was great, when he saw that hope was to be provided for him, all the gold of the world given to a mendiant, would not have produced more effect.

—Divine Providence, exclaimed Laprise, how good you are to me. I was desperate expecting nothing from men. God has permitted that our mate could reach you for our salvation.

—Where are the others shipwrecked men, enquired the Anse Pleureuse men, the mate has said you were four.

—It is true, we are four, but, were they are. I cannot say. I know that my wife is still on board the ship. Dead or alive, I cannot say.

Then let us make enquiries, said all these men. With the exception of two, all the others left at once in the direction of the *Swordfish*. When arrived opposite they perceived the two English sailors, sitting on a stone. As Laprise, they also had lost all hope of being saved. How happy and glad they looked when they seen friends so near hand.

At the time, the blood tide was up and the ship hide and dry aground they could go aboard easily.

Those who penetrated into the cabin witnessed a fearful scene. Laprise's wife was still alive, but she was agonizing and almost naked.

She was laying senseless, her feet on deck among ropes and rigging. A faithful dog was near poor woman.

They removed her the best way they could that unfortunate being and brought her ashore near a good fire they had made near the rock where Laprise had then the consolation of seeing his wife again, but her death was already imminent. Half an hour after, she breathed her last in her husbands arms. How his sorrow was great, it is easy to conceive, in that awful calamity succeeding to so many others.

Afterwards the Anse-Pleureuse men went aboard again and brought all the articles left by the sailors and conveyed them ashore. That is the custom for those who give their help in cases of shipwrecked men, to pay and satisfy themselves for their trouble.

One of the plunderers, in hiding in a place a pack of clothing, heard as some one mourning for help, he waited to certify from where the sounds came from, and as he advanced to the place from where the sounds came from, to his great astonishment poor

Castagne was discovered in a very bad state. Castagne, poor fellow, he also thought he was abandoned for ever. He was concient of all that happened a short distance from where he was ; but in spite of all his efforts he had not been able to utter any sounds, to be made heard.

The man whom Providence had sent to his help, unable to carry him alone went to the camp for assistance. Shortly after, Castagne was placed near the fire along with his companions of misfortune.

They had to cut his boots to take them of his feet, his hands and feet, being completely frozen.

Sad to say, but these savage men, anxious of plunder, were on the point of neglecting the poor victims of the shipwreck and wanted to leave for the brigantine again. This terrified Castagne ; speaking to an old man, he said :

—Good old man, for God sake, stop near us and don't abandon us, we are all enduring great sufferings, give me some snow to alleviate my thirst and feaver. Have some pity for us, poor infortunate. You are of an advanced age, it is perhaps the last good deed before you leave this world.

These touching words excite the pity of the man, so he remained. On the return of

the plunderers, a tent was made out of the sails and they all passed the night there.

The next morning the second of December, the wind was strong as ever and immense quantities of snow were pushed by the wind. The intense cold added to the sufferings of those that a common misfortune had joined together, at the foot of Gros Mâle.

Four fisher of that country remained with them, while the others went back to their village.

The second mate had the good idea to send some one to Mont-Louis to inform the missionary of that locality of what had taken place. The priest, Mr. Pierre Roussel, as soon as he was informed of all these events, looked for temporary lodging for the sailors of the *Swordfish*. Those to whom he spoke all cheerfully consented to take them. This done, the Minister of the Gospel went to l'Anse Pleureuse, where he stopped, waiting for the other victims.

In the morning of the third, the gale having abated and the sea more calm, two barges were got under sail. They went for the poonsailors, more dead than alive, in a shed open on all sides. Conyasses were fixed in these barges, and the poor workmen were accommodated there, the best way possible. Mrs. Laprise's body was afterwards buried at Mont-Louis.

Nothing particular hapened on the way to the village, the landing took place without accident. But the good missionary at the sight of all these unfortunates could not help shedding abundant tears. These pale faces, disfigured by their long endurances, these rigid attitudes testified eloquently of their past and present sufferings.

They were carried away in a house where some food was given to them. They had not touched any food since three days, notwithstanding their meal did not last long, they had lost their strength along with their appetite. Mr. Abbé Roussel took with him to Mont-Louis, Cyprien Morin, second, A. Laprise, Reilly and Boyle. As for Andrew Castagne, it was deemed prudent by the missionary to leave him at l'Anse Pleureuse, our hero looking too sick to endure the fatigues of a renewed journey. The poor man would have preferred following his companions. To encourage him, the priest told that he would come back for him in a few days.

Instructions were given to the proprietor of the house to take a good care of Castagne, and inform the worthy priest in case of danger.

The house in which he was place was in a very bad state, snow blowing through the

cracks in the walls. Herrings and potatoes consisted their food, no meat and no bread. A cat had to be killed to procure the necessary grease to be placed on the frozen arms and feet of the unfortunate Castagne.

On the fifth December, Messrs Rousseau and Saucier on their way from Magdalen Islands to Quebec, paid him a visit. Castagne happy of that unexpected visit, begged of his visitors to inform his wife of the position in which he was placed.

In the meantime, his sufferings far from diminishing were increasing. His arms and feet were fearfully swollen and had assumed a black color. During the day after sixth, he many time became unconscious. Mr. Roussel was at once despatched and informed of the fact. At ten o'clock at night he was at Castagne bed side. Travelling between Mont-Louis and Anse Pleufeuse was a hard one, the shore being covered with immense quantities of snow.

Castagne was then procured of all the consolations and sacraments that the Church bestows upon her children at the moment of death. These last rites were of a great relief for the poor dying man, he showed signs of piety and resignation to the will of God. It was decided then, to convey him in a better place two days later.

At the appointed day, the missionary with eight men of Mont-Louis, according to what was promised, came to l'Anse Plenreuse. They had a sort of sleigh and a ox instead of a horse. In these districts, there are no horses.

The sick man felt a little better. He was laid on the sleigh and wrapt up with good sheets.

The distance he was to be taken was nine miles and Castagne frightened of the long time it would take to go there, remarked to Mr. Roussel.

"This vehicle will be my tomb. I think I will die on the way."

—Don't fear, answered the good priest, you shall not succumb. We will carry the sleigh when the roads will be too hard.

Mr. Fournier's house was reached safely; a bed had been prepared there for the cast away man. At his sight, all the inmates of the house were horrified and all possible care given him. Notwithstanding this, every thing necessary for food was wanting and they could not give what would have been absolutely necessary in Castagne situation. As stated before, their food consisted of potatoes.

In these distant countries of Gaspésie when fishing is poor every article is wanting.

Not having products to sell in the fall these people were not able to buy provisions. In these circumstances, our hero's position was not in a way of progressing for the better. Poor Castagne was suffering horribly. Moreover, his hands and feet spread an horrible smell and a sort of poisoning was the consequence of it.

The amputation of the frozen extremities became then necessary. Unfortunately the nearest doctor lived far. It took many days before they could get one. On receipt of a letter from Mr Roussel, the agent of the customs at Quebec, despatched to Mont-Louis Dr. Parke, M. Griffine and one guide, Jos. La voie, with clothings for the shipwrecked men. The roads were impracticable. From Ste Anne des Monts, they had to wear snow shoes, a distance of fourteen leagues from Mont-Louis.

Castagne was very happy that he received first Dr Park's attention :

—« How lucky I am to see you, said he, I was anxiously waiting your arrival, so as to get rid of my hands and feet, which make me suffer so much. »

—« I have to see the others, said the Doctor, and to morrow, I will make the required operation. »

The next day, 1st January 1868, he came as promised, and the two hands were ampu-

tated. After the operation, the poor man said to the Doctor :

« Here is my new years gifts, now that you have commenced, make also the amputation of my feet.»

—No, was his answer, you are at present too weak. I have to go to Manche-d'Epée, where other poor shipwrecked men of the ship *Woodstock* are waiting. On my return, I will attend to you.

On Dr. Parke's return to Mont-Louis, he also amputated Laprise's feet, who was living then with one Mr. Laflamme. The two English sailors, would not consent to have an operation performed on them, the consequence was that shortly after, their hands and feet got separated from their body without operation.

On the fourth, the Doctor and the Missionary went to see our hero, they found him better.

—The bad smell from my hands is over. I can eat now with certain appetite. My dear Doctor, do the same thing as for my feet ; take them off if possible.

—But you are still too weak, my friend, your blood is gone away, and you would not be able to suffer another operation.

—Never mind, he said, I will die only with God's will. You have been sent here to make amputations well ! make them !

—All right, said the Doctor, your wishes will be granted, but I will not chloroform you ; you are not strong enough.

While the operation was being performed, the poor man had an old pipe in his mouth. Shortly after, he closed his eyes and heard nothing. The next day he acquired little strength. From that day, Castagne improved rapidly.

On the tenth, Dr. Parke left for Quebec with Cyrien Morin, the second. The chief mate Castagne, of the *Swordfish* did not fail to inform his wife. She had written to him each month, since Rousseau and Saucier had told her of her husband's misfortune. Castagne passed four months in bed, not being able to move on his back. To his great sufferings was added another sickness the itch, rendering his position unbearable as he was deprived of the use of his hands to alleviate his sufferings.

On the eight of May, all the shipwrecked men who had passed the winter at Mont-Louis, were put on board a little barge as to go on board of a steamship on his way bound to Québec. But a thick fog prevented them from seeing the steamship, and they had to come to shore, a great disappointment for the poor sailors ; they were

anxious to leave that spot of their sufferings. At last, the 20 May, they were put on board Mr. Rousseau's schooner, a diver, who had come there to get the *Swordfish* riggings. The return to Quebec was safe. The sailors so sadly experienced, were at the Marine Hospital, under the care of Drs. Landry and Lemieux. They deemed necessary that another amputation on one of Castagne's feet should be made. Our hero supported with the same courage as before that renewed ordeal. His wounds were rapidly cured since his health has always been good. But for his infirmities, he would be to day strong and vigorous and able to face the dangers of a seaman's life. But deprived of his hands and feet, it is impossible for him to accomplished any work, that is what makes him so sad at the idea of having to support a wife and seven children. In his position, that worthy father needs great public assistance.

Christians be charitable to him !

